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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000774

SIPDIS

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STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#) [HOSTAGES](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: JUNE 2-4 HOSTAGE-TAKING - ADDITIONAL
DETAILS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D and E).

HOSTAGE-TAKING DUE TO COMMUNITY DISPUTE,
BUT WITH OUTSIDE EXPERTISE AND INTEREST

1. (C) Released AmCit hostage Texas Richards confirmed the weekend hostage-taking was primarily a local community-based incident. Richards said the hostage-takers were local villagers armed with older, poorly-maintained weapons. The hostages were held in Duwumi village (Ekeremor local government area in Bayelsa). Richards said he recognized villagers who had previously worked aboard the rig, and also saw four uniformed Mobile Policemen who were clearly part of the community. Richards said the hostages were well treated and fed.

2. (C) Richards did not recognize the two men who led the kidnapers, but said they were better armed than the rest of the gang and seemed to have some experience in wielding weapons and authority. Richards described the hostage-taking as efficient and fairly well-planned, with the attackers knowing the layout of the rig. (Comment: It is unlikely that residents of a small village could carry out a hostage-taking as efficiently as this one. Either a few of the "sons" of the village have joined a militant group and returned home to ply their craft on behalf of their townspeople, or the two unrecognized leaders could be "hired guns" with experience from other attacks. End comment.)

3. (C) According to Richards, approximately fifty heavily-armed men claiming to be from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) visited Duwumi June 3 and 4. Richards said their local captors were frightened by these heavily-armed visitors. Richards described an apparent dispute over control of the hostages. For a brief period, the hostages were hidden in the nearby brush when the locals thought MEND would try to strong-arm the hostages from them. Nonetheless, the community group retained control of the hostages, and released them on Sunday. (Comment: MEND claims it is observing an informal cease-fire to give the GON time to honor its commitments to bring economic development projects to the Niger Delta. If the heavily-armed visitors were MEND, two conflicting interpretations of their presence are possible. The most likely is that the informal cease-fire is fraying and MEND wanted to exploit this hostage-taking to its advantage. The other, albeit less likely, interpretation is that MEND had promised the Bayelsa State governor that it would help end the kidnapping as it did not want to be accused of causing it. Thus, they sent some heavily-armed members to "encourage" the local abductors to quickly free their captives. End comment.)

4. (C) Equator Exploration said they were reviewing security regarding the fourteen Dolphin Drilling personnel remaining on the rig (thirteen expatriates), and will maintain ship patrols between the rig and the shore and begin holding emergency drills.

5. (U) Bayelsa State has summoned leaders of the affected local community, executives of Peak oil company and federal government officials to a meeting in Yenagoa, the state capital, in order to work out a modus vivendi that would discourage further incidents.

BROWNE